

The One

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Exhibition Statement

The Cultural Revolution, Chinese Economic Reform, One-child policy, and the 1989 Movement of Democratic Change not only affected the development of the People's Republic of China but also influenced the generation who was born after 1979 at the time the One-child policy began. My photography exhibition - "*The One*" presents the perspective of an only child born into this regime. This exhibition narrates the birth and rebirth of an only child who was not aware of the experience or education of the Tiananmen Square Protest in 1989. The work attempts to recreate stories from fragmented memories that incorporate my fantasies. This exhibition represents the influence of the one-child policy on my parents' generation and mine. In addition to these legislated restrictions, it portrays elements of my desire to be unhindered by unexplained political ideologies, government cultural propaganda and bureaucracies.

I was born in China in 1985 and grew up in an environment where families were all one-child families. During the 1970s the Chinese government started to encourage citizens to have only two children in each family. The incentive for this policy was the ongoing Cultural Revolution and the strain it placed on the nation. During this time, the birth rate dropped from nearly six children per family to three or four. However, this decreased rate was not enough to help China recover from poor economic conditions caused by 20th century wars. In 1979, the Chinese government made the family planning policy law and each family was permitted to have only one child. As a result of this one-child policy, China became one of the first countries to legislate birth fertility into law.

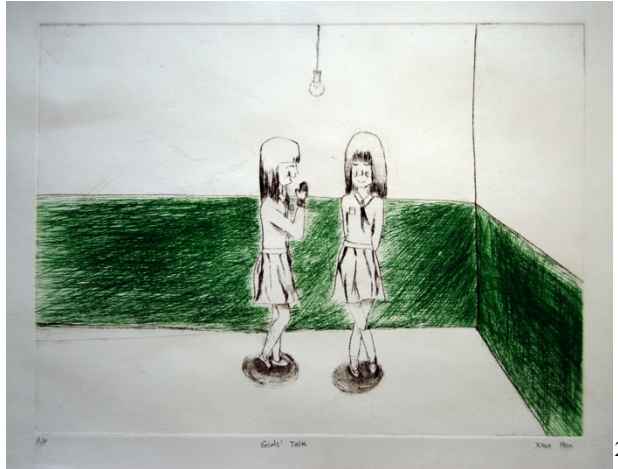
My hometown is Wuhan, an industrial city with a population of 8.313 million as of the year 2000. My parents taught in a science and technology college. My friends were

my parents' colleagues' children. Since we were the only children in our families we were called “The One-Child Generation” or “Te Bao Er” which translates to “special safeguarding children.” I did not stray from this circumscribed environment until I went to high school.

I came to Canada in 2008 and acquired a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Thompson Rivers University. The culture of Western contemporary art offered me a new perspective on my own art practices. In the first two years of my program, I studied printmaking and photography. The artists that influenced my work at that time were Kiki Smith and Andy Warhol. Most of the subject matter of my artwork that was produced at this institution stemmed from my cultural background, such works include the brick wall in a mural printmaking installation: *Propaganda Wall Printing*¹, 2012; or an etching print of a school scene with a green wall and two Asian girls in uniform: *Girls' Talk*², 2012. This culture is part of me and I identify very strongly with it. As a Chinese artist, I am attempting to reflect upon my own culture and lived experience from a Western perspective.



¹ Xiao Han, *Propaganda Wall Printing*, Screen Printing, 2012



For my 2013 BFA Exhibition I chose to expose the one-child policy since it is also a contemporary issue that is part of my own cultural background. As a twenty-five-year-old woman and an only child caught up in this politically-charged issue I felt both personal and societal pressure to fight back. I am my family's only hope to carry on our lineage. Through my research, I have gained new insights into the loneliness that an only child feels when growing up. I had never thought about this problem because all of my friends were in the same situation. The social environment did not make me feel I was different from others until I left the country. In comparison to my Canadian friends and their siblings who are the same age as me, I realize I have led a isolated existence. Looking back at my childhood memories, spending time with my neighbors was enough. I was too young to understand what loneliness truly was.

For my BFA Exhibition, I composed an installation stage that depicted the Chinese traditional rice storage of the 1980s. These handmade rice sacks were printed with Chinese family portraits depicting only three members of a family and an invented logo "*Best Gene*³." The image of a "three-person family" printed on a rice sack was part of a collection I made from the family photographs that I asked my friends to send me.

² Xiao Han, *Girls' Talk*, Etching, 2012

The quantity of rice sacks represents the wealth of the farm. In my work, each rice sack was a metaphor for the one-child family and represented how prosperous the family line would be in the future. Three people for each rice sack make a statement for the “One-Child Policy” theme.

This one-child generation has grown up over the past twenty years. As a result, there is a lot of responsibility and pressure tied to being the only child. The Western world is both curious and critical of the Chinese Government’s Family Planning Policy. I chose myself as the subject to demonstrate the impact of the one-child policy and what it currently means to be an only child from China.



When I began my Master of Fine Arts program at the University of Saskatchewan in 2013, I set out to combine theatre and photography. For the pinhole camera photo series, *Obsession*⁴, I asked my friend Donghui Lv to be my model. I attempt to convey a woman’s emotional state regarding her memories and her obsession with living her life as if immersed in these memories. The pinhole photo quality of softness combined with the surreal dark green background, soil, and flowers create a

³ Xiao Han, *Best Gene*, installation, 2013

romantic painting-like quality. The masculine items such as the shirt in the third image and shoes in the suitcase in the last image imply the absence of a male character.

Exposure through the pinhole camera requires the model to stand still for about two minutes. I intended to portray this staged experiment on narration and politically-based storytelling through a series of photographs in a poetic way.



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After the experimentation with the pinhole camera, I made another series of photos on a stage with more defined props such as fake clouds and fake flowers. *The Poster girl*⁴ is my first staged performance photograph. I dressed up myself and posed in front of the camera to mimic the models from old Shanghai advertisement posters such as a *Shanghai advertisement poster for beer*. This project's objective was to show the

⁴ Xiao Han, *Obsession*, 2013

experience of performance and to look at the reflection of the social gaze on female bodies. The artificial clouds and flowers described a surreal space such as the studio or a similar theatrical space to show how the advertisement explained the way society looked at women during the 1930s in Shanghai.



Throughout my undergraduate studies, I was greatly influenced by Cindy Sherman's photographs. Her self-performance in front of the camera inspired me to use my own body as subject matter in my own artwork. Throughout her performances, she experiments with the affect of makeup and costumes. She inserts herself into staged film stills mimicking the lens of the male gaze. The embellishment and movie scene recreation have been a source of inspiration within my current practices in photography.

⁵ *Shanghai advertisement poster for beer*

⁶ Xiao Han, *The Poster Girl*, 2014



After I practiced self-directing, I decided to use my own body to do performances. I made one photograph, *Summer Time*⁸, as a medium for recording my exhaustion of going back and forth between Canada and China every summer. The sweetness of going back to my hometown turns into bitterness by the end of the vacation every year. This anxiety reminds me why I don't want to go back to Wuhan. The comparison between the romantic flowers and the exhausted girl in *Summer Time*⁸ demonstrates my struggle of being so far away from home.



⁷ Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills*, 1977-1980

⁸ Xiao Han, *Summer Time*, 2014

The way that I stage the garden with the props and my body in this photo mimics one of my favorite photographers: Gregory Crewdson's *Untitled (Woman in Flowers)*⁹. I admire his cinematic photography and his use of surreal light settings. He hires crews to set up stages and uses a large format camera to shoot photographic footage. In Crewdson's photography, there are a lot of small details that convey clues and demonstrate the concepts and the relationships between each of the staged characters. For example, in *Brief Encounters*¹⁰: the mirror reflects the other side of the room and the male character does not appear in the image. Similarly, in another photograph *Dream House*¹¹, the depiction of a mother and daughter scene, tension is created not only in their body language, but also through the chaos on the tea table and cushion on the floor. Crewdson approaches his photographic compositions as one would when shooting films; we can compare him to filmmaker but he uses one shot to describe the entire story in his photo. His work encouraged me to peruse photo narration in only one or two frames. He also influenced my stage setting: using props as clues or subtle details to reflect relationships in the story scene became very important.



⁹ Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled (Woman in Flowers)*, from series "Twilight" 1998-2000.



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Being John Malkovich, directed by Spike Jonze in 1999, is another inspiration within my current art practice. In this movie, John Malkovich goes into his own brain and all he can see in this fabricated world is the repetition of his own face. The multiple exposures of his own face in that scene inspired me to dress up in different roles and appear in the same photograph to signify my own reflection of people from my personal memories. Multiple-exposures of the body exemplify the self-centered experiences of the only child. These cinematic models directly influenced the way I produced my photographs.



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¹⁰ Gregory Crewdson, *Brief Encounters*, 2012

¹¹ Gregory Crewdson, *Dream House*, 2002

¹² Spike Jonze, *Being John Malkovich*, 1999

My next study encompassed classroom politics through the use of multiple-exposures. The school and classroom were the most immediate place for people to be influenced by ideologies in my childhood. Within the classroom environment, proper behaviour and attitudes are instilled within each of us by the government and authority figures. During the time I grew up, school was a dark place to go. Pressure was everywhere in the classroom and it was very competitive. There was lots of bullying from classmates, verbal abuse from our teachers, and occasional physical punishments. We dressed in the same school uniforms every day. They were ugly, uncomfortable, and made of rough materials. My uniform was blue with white patches as seen in the *History of Chinese Uniforms*¹³. As the young pioneers of China¹³, we were also required to wear a red scarf every Monday to show respect to the Communist Party.

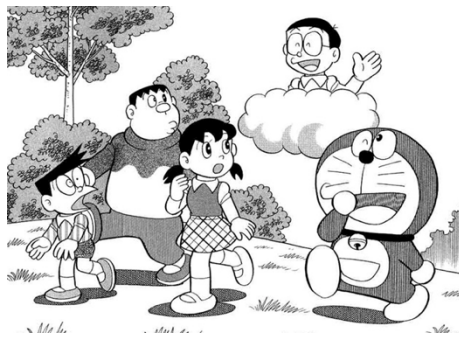


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¹³ The Young Pioneers of China is run by the Communist Youth League, an organization of older youth that comes under the Communist Party of China.

¹⁴ Jing Hua Epaper, *History of Chinese Uniforms*, 2014 sept 02 http://epaper.jinghua.cn/html/2014-09/02/content_122413.htm

I created the subsequent installation to talk about my perspective of school with its normative discourse, uniformity, female relationships, teenage hierarchy, school bullying, and the overarching male gaze. In this series of photos, I ironically change the ugly uniform to a sexy private school girl uniform in reference to Japanese comic books^{14,15}.



I wanted to wear a skirt that was more in line with traditional gender codes, that “girls should have long hair and wear skirts; boys should have short hair and wear pants.” However, our school would handout neutral sports-style clothes that were poorly designed when compared with the uniforms in Japanese comics. I admired long hair but, for practical reasons, I had short hair until grade ten. In the image *School Scene 1*¹⁶ and *School Scene 2*¹⁷ the girl with short hair represents my appearance during primary school.

The two girls whispering in the *School Scene 1*¹⁶ represent my memory of me and my girlfriend exchanging secrets. The intimate tension between the two girls implies same-sex infatuation. This type of relationship was considered to be an illness by the

¹⁵ Fujimoto Hiroshi, *Doraemon*, 1969~1991.

¹⁶ Japanese Manga, *Itazura Na Kiss*, 1996.

elders of the community. This classroom scene represents a pivotal point in my life because I chose a path of independence rather than abiding by conformity to social norms.



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Within the educational hierarchy in China, there is competition revolving around grades and behaviours. Good behaviour is rewarded with a higher mark and is represented with red stripes on one shoulder. An intimate relation with the same-sex is deemed unacceptable and in order to maintain high regard in the educational hierarchy

¹⁷ *School Scene 1, 2015*

¹⁸ *School Scene 2, 2015*

these flirtatious urges would have to be repressed. The second school scene¹⁷ narrates these tensions and the bullying imposed by peers. Collectively, the two images represent how the youth are good at bullying with or without a powerful authority figure present. Students would try to abuse one victim in order to avoid a particular problem or to punish their victim being better. The target in this photo series is the girl who got rewarded with two stripes on her shoulder.

Part of the Chinese writing on the board is about the date; it provides clues regarding the period of time in June 1989. Translated, it indicates, “18 days left to the final exam.” Typically, the final exam was scheduled at the end of June. In the *School Scene 2*¹⁷, the number is changed to “17 days left to the final exam.” There is a one-day difference between these two photos, and everything changes when the teacher appears in the classroom. The date on the blackboard implies the last few days of the Tiananmen Square Protest when the Chinese government started to “clean up” the mess at Tiananmen Square in 1989. The significance of the events in 1989 relate to my struggles in gaining acceptance from my parents. I rebelled against their indoctrinated beliefs from communist rule in pursuit of who I wanted to become. This ultimately created a disconnect from my father.

The texts on the board shows excerpts from a popular text during my junior high school’s literature class, named “The Sight of Father’s Back,” which aimed to symbolize an invisible male presence. The writer describes the day he left his father and hometown to go to another city for college. It demonstrates the respect he had toward his father, and his sadness for saying goodbye to his childhood. In addition to the representation of the father on the blackboard, famous male icons are on the posters, such as Karl Marx, Deng

Xiao Ping, and Confucius. It symbolically suggests patriarchal control. This signifies textual references from the generation of the 1980s. This “The Sight of Father’s Back” article no longer exists within my primary school’s textbook. The multiple exposures of myself throughout this scene reflect several experiences that impacted my decision to break free from Chinese social indoctrination.

The following scene deals with female trauma as a result of the one-child policy and the influence of the westernized sexual revolution in China. During the 1980s and 1990s, China’s discussion about sex was highly censored within public spaces. The Economic Reform that began in 1978 allowed the Chinese people to look at the Western culture more independently. Sex was still an unspeakable topic but was beginning to be more publicly accepted. After the Economic Reform, the Sexual Revolution and the Women’s Liberation Movements began, influencing Chinese women to attend college and obtain jobs within public spaces. Unfortunately, sex education was still not taken seriously and this lack of education mostly victimized women.

With the exception of public government hospitals, there are underground female clinics that are an alternative to the public government hospital. Underground clinics serve women exclusively and raise issues such as gender definition for those one-child parents who want to have a boy. Gender preference resulted in an increase in abortions and was responsible for causing countless traumatic surgical accidents.

The couple had had two children, both girls. In order to have a son, the couple left their home village, because the local officials would not have

allowed her to give birth a third child. They would have required the woman to have an abortion, even a partial-birth abortion.¹⁹

Teenage girls were often afraid to tell their parents about their pregnancies, so they would seek potentially dangerous abortions from these clinics rather than going to public government hospitals. The clinics also served to remove the intra-uterine devices for a fraction of the price compared to government hospitals. It unfairly placed the bulk of the responsibility on women for such things as not being able to give birth to a son or pregnancy out of wedlock. Pregnancy out of wedlock is something that is considered shameful for a woman, but never for a man.

Before moving to Canada to pursue my aspiration in arts I ended a relationship with a man who intended on controlling my direction in life by making me pregnant. His ideology was to shame me with an unwed pregnancy therefore forcing me into wedlock. I felt helpless and imprisoned because my father would rather side with this man instead of having a shameful daughter. I solved this problem without involving my parents.

My *Clinic Scene 1&2*^{19,20} depicts an institution in which the Chinese government indirectly exploits women's physical and psychological welfare by forcing compliant demographics in underground facilities. Blood in this scene is a symbol of women's suffering. The blood has been caused by a clinical accident such as a failed IUD implant or an abortion. The blood could also represent loss of virginity or violent act such as rape. The implication of sex or possibility of violence towards the female body in this scene acts as a metaphor for the government having "raped" our lives.

¹⁹ Nie, Jing Bao, *Behind the Silence, Chinese Voice on Abortion*, 2005, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. p159

The elements on the wall also have a strong significance in the photograph. The female clinic, as an institution, was always a mystery to me. I wondered about the significance of the anatomical picture of the womb on the wall and what it meant. A quick glance around the clinic made me remember those elements. The anatomy picture, the red flag, and the way the white cloth hides a mystery behind it also holds great significance. The more the adults tried to avoid this taboo subject matter the more curious I became. The doctor is another symbol of authoritative power within this series of photos. The nurse and the doctor exhibit very numb facial expressions as they look towards the audience in *Clinic Scene 1* and towards the girl with the blood trickling down her leg in *Clinic Scene 2*. Both of their expressions represent not only the lack of sex education available for women but also their complacent support for the government's one-child policy which has been responsible for the physical and psychological abuse that these regulations imposed on women. The man's shirt hanging on the wall in the corner is used as an element to balance the gender roles within the photo. I wanted to use it as an allusion to the patriarchy that caused the blood between the girl's legs.



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¹⁹ *Clinic Scene 1, 2015*



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My grandmother told me a story of how nervous she was when she found out her third pregnancy was going to be twins. Her third and forth offspring made her worried that her actions were disobeying the Communist Party. She said, “Chairman Mao called upon us to not give birth to more than three children in each family,” and yet she accidentally had four children. This “accident” happened in many families during the 1960s and 1970s. This caused the population to grow much faster. As a result, the government decided to make birth control into a law in 1978. The one-child policy was enacted on September 18th, 1980. My father and grandfather were both Party members and they strictly followed the Party’s rule. From that time the “accident” rarely happened because there were numerous methods for the government to implement birth control. New married couples were forced to apply for a “birth permit paper” before they could have a baby. Communities would hand out free condoms and birth control pills in order to encourage such policies. The government hospital performed *Intra-uterine device* insertion and tubal ligation procedures at inexpensive prices to further their dogma.

²⁰ *Clinic Scene 2, 2015*

In stark contrast, abortions or surgeries for taking out an IUD cost far more. An immense amount of paperwork would be required to be signed by the community office that would prove that a person was eligible to have these surgeries. This unwieldy process has manipulated most Chinese citizens to avoid their second pregnancy due to the inconvenience of such paperwork. Each city block had a government representative who frequently checked neighbors for unwanted pregnancies. Women had no authority regarding their own fertility. It was very hard to hide a pregnancy or a baby during that time. After the first child, an IUD was strongly recommended. If any of these mothers accidentally had a second pregnancy, they would be forced to have an abortion and then have an IUD inserted to prevent further pregnancies. When done improperly, IUD procedures often caused complications. Cultural stereotypes suggested that “giving birth to a boy would make a woman’s life easier,” so women who had daughters wanted their second child badly, hoping to have a son. They could not ask the public government hospital to take care of their pregnancy or remove an IUD out of their body so they would often go to the underground clinic.

There are countless tragedies about women’s late-term abortions because they had no birth permit. Newborn girls would often be abandoned in the hospital. Uterine disease caused by improper IUD insertion would disrupt marriages and lead to much physical hardship for women. Women’s lives were unquestionably tough in China during the 1980s because of the one-child policy and the policies that were enforced as a result.

As part of a one-child family women carried an immense amount of responsibility. This project, *Lili’s Family*²², represents the pressures experienced from the perspective of the Chinese woman. I removed the husband and daughter or mother

²² *Lili’s Family*, 2014

character, and left a woman who could both represent the daughter or the mother in a one-child family on the stage. The audience gets clues from the family portrait on the pillowcase. The pillowcase photo, is one of *the first collection, one child family portrait*²⁵ from my friends from China, which contains an etching photo transfer print on fabric. I sewed the fabric into a pillowcase because it references an intimate space in the home.



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*The Forbidden City*²² encapsulates jars of soil which were part of my installation project, made in 2014. It was a metaphor for children growing-up individually within our motherland. The jars in *Lili's Family*²¹ reflect the tensions caused by the children who are noisy and make her anxious. Lili covers her face with the pillowcase in an attempt to avoid the pressure of family and society's critique of women's responsibility for children who will carry forth the family line.



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The next series of photographs, *Mother and Daughter*^{23,24}, represent the relationship between two generations. Their outfits and degree of eye contact differentiate them. Both of the female characters clarify my feminist critique of contemporary Chinese society. People from my mother's generation went through the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1974. This carried the chaos and turmoil from a very dark time. Fashion and style were seen as sinful during the Cultural Revolution. China advocated a refusal of and a resistance to Western culture. After 1980, the Economic Reform allowed China to study Western culture. A few of these influences included Hipster Culture, the Anti-war Movement, Women's Liberation and the Sexual Revolution. This influence was revolutionary and opened options to women such as fashion choices like hair color, exaggerated makeup and mini skirts. The two female figures in this series of photographs are comparing two different generational women's perspectives as society changes.

²³ *Forbidden City, Parapraxis*, Gordon Snelgrove Gallery, 2014



The photo album in the mother's hand, which contains old photos from my friends' families, is part of the installation in *The One* Exhibition. From 2012 onward, I began to collect family photos from my friends. A scanner or a cellphone camera was used to reshoot their childhood family photos. The first collection²⁵ depicted the “three family members” a photo to represent the one-child policy. These photographs served to promote the reduction of the population reflected in each family. The second collection²⁶ depicts the sibling family portrait that was taken before the 1980s from my parents' generation. The third collection²⁷ was my cousins' photo from 1990s. They look like

²⁴ *Mother and Daughter 1, 2014*

²⁵ *Mother and Daughter 2, 2014*

siblings but are in fact cousins. The one-child policy generation considers cousins to be their “brothers and sisters.”



²⁶ the first collection, one child family portrait

²⁷ the second collection, mother's sibling's portrait



The gallery space is designed as an environment with photographic and staged installation sections. This will invite audiences to interact within the spaces in response to the photographic scenes. Because all the fantasies that I narrate in the photo represent memory, which is conceptual and abstract, the actual objects such as the album and green wall help the audience to feel more intimate with the scenes themselves.

After I collected many of my friends' family portraits I wanted to create my own family photo. In *My Family Portrait*²⁸, I made my family photo without my parents in my studio. This family photo represents my thesis statement "The One." It reflects not only the idea of the family of three but also highlights the only-child's psychological state of mind, such as the loneliness and self-centeredness as seen by everyone but themselves. It also highlights the responsibility children have for the propagation of their parents' genes. This project was originally designed as a prop-photo in the *Family Dinnertime*²⁹.

²⁸ the third collection, my cousins' portraits



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After I completed *My Family Portrait*²⁸, I located the portrait in the *Family Dinnertime*²⁹ scene as a prop. This scene depicts a family dinner at news time. Throughout my childhood, seven in the evening meant two things to me: the CCTV news would start, and it was time to go home. Within my scene there is a news report on TV about the Tiananmen Square protest with the world famous “*Tank man*.”³⁰

²⁹ *My Family Portrait*, 2014

³⁰ *Family Dinnertime*, 2015



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In the photograph *Family Dinnertime*²⁹ it is dinner time but the girl is not home yet. As in the *Clinic Scene*^{19,20}, the audience wonders whether she could be injured or in danger. The parents have worried looks on their faces. The calendar sits beside the TV and I deliberately open it to June 4th. The woman looks worried with her hand covering her mouth. The image shown on the TV screen depicts the famous 1989 Tiananmen Square protest. Meanwhile the parents' main worry is about their missing daughter.



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The significance of the missing girl is that she is the only child. If she got injured or worse, her parents could not handle the loss. When the one-child policy began, the government used numerous methods to exemplify the benefits of having only one

³¹ Stuart Franklin, *Tank man*, June 5th, 1989

³² Mural painting for one child policy <http://www.asiaobserver.org/china-one-child-policy>

child in each family. Mural painting³¹ with propaganda was common in the 1980s and 1990s. They usually proclaimed that “to have only one child to make life better.” The photo contradicts this as the loss of the one-child only makes the parents lives more stressful.

A Chinese photographer He Chong Yue produced a series of photographs based on these “One Child Policy” slogans on individual walls placed beside the Chinese highways^{33,34}. He worked with a large format camera to take these photos. He used a round mirror hanging in the center of the painting so that viewers can see the reflection of the camera and the artist:

The artist determinedly explores the recent past by researching wall and stone tablet messaging as forms of political and cultural communication, the One-Child Policy, and the aging population in China and its diminished role within a modern Chinese society.³³



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³³ Alice Schmatzberger,, *He Chongyue: Layers of Time and Space*, Volume 12, Number 6, November/December 2013.

³⁴ He Chongyue, *A Billion to One: Dictated Parenthood and the Feudal Mind*, 2006



I explore the idea of the slogan wall and what the slogan wall contributes to the one-child propaganda in China within my photograph *After School*³⁵. The red bricks represent the type of architectural wall that was commonplace in China in the 1980s. The red flag, red banner, and red scarf are symbols of how authority rewards its citizens. Elements on the tea table and the floor represent people's life style from my memories. My hometown of Wuhan is very hot and humid. In the summertime, Wuhan citizens, particularly from my grandfather's generation, love to bring their supper or snacks into the alley to spend time with neighbors. In the 1980s, television was not popular in China, so some of the neighbors would share one TV.

*After school*³⁵, occurs at dinnertime when people are relaxing and waiting for dinner in the alley. They are chatting with neighbors and watching the CCTV News on the shared television at 7:00 pm. In this scene I used two male figures and included the same girl who appears in all of my subsequent scenes. Two of the characters are watching

³⁵ He Chongyue, *A Billion to One: Dictated Parenthood and the Feudal Mind*, 2006

the TV screen, which depicts the Tank Man³⁰. This implies that this scene synchronizes with Family Dinnertime²⁹.



The stage in my old studio³⁶ (between 2013 to 2015) included a set with two moveable walls. The stage was set up so that I could move the props around to create and recreate scenes. The moveable props provided the possibility of combining and recombining those simple elements into many scenes. The repetition of re-using some of the same props in the different scenes, not only depicts the furniture as a common feature that appears in many Chinese institutions or families in the 1980s but also reinforces the theatricality of the scene.

Some typical elements such as the hanging light bulb, the blackboard, the green wall, the photo album, and the red reward flag, repeatedly appears in my art projects or photo scenes. The green wall and the light bulb appear in my *Best Gene*³, 2013 BFA

³⁶ *After School*, 2015

exhibition. The green wall and light bulb appear again in the photographic series *School Scene*^{16,17}. The photo album appears in the *Mother and Daughter*^{23,24} and *Clinic*^{19,20} scenes. These props will continue to reappear in my upcoming exhibition – “*The One*”. The stage setup in the gallery space will invite audiences to look at and interact with these scenes. The photos and the objects that I incorporate reflect these moments in time that trace my early memories. This will both exemplify and amplify the idea of active performance in my work.



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In the last scene *After School*³⁵, I started to take out the props and use more active performance to fill the photograph. I used the back of my moveable walls that look like panels to further emphasize the idea of performance. I wanted to forego the multiple stages and emphasize my performance on just one static stage.

After I moved to Canada I researched the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 as it was portrayed through Western media documentaries. The Chinese government, to this date, still does not have any literature regarding this world famous protest. I realized my generation, the one child generation, rarely knows or cares about what happened in

³⁷ Studio 328, 2014

1989, or other significant political events for that matter. Recently the Chinese government has employed even more pervasive propaganda. They have foregone wall murals and now control all mass media. Today all visible and searchable information has been filtered by the government mass media. There is no Google, Facebook or YouTube. Words such as “Tiananmen 1989” have been banned by most Chinese websites. This means that if I had never moved out of China I would not have known that there were thousands of students who fought for change in 1989.

My desire for freedom encouraged me to rebel from all of these restrictions. I took a video at a beach on June 4th, 2015, in Thailand, to symbolize the commemoration of liberation. The date was significant to this video because each year on June 4th, Chinese websites become extremely sensitive. The government not only bans the sensitive words “Tiananmen,” “protest,” “democracy,” and “June 4th” from websites but also guards Tiananmen Square very closely. The government does not allow any commemorative activities or sacrifices in honor of the protest, so I performed my own commemoration of the Tiananmen Square protests out of the country, secretly.



³⁸ Video, June 4th, June 4th 2015

In the looping video³⁷ I stand, like a photographic still and let the steady rhythmic waves and sounds indicate the endless voice from my heart. The Chinese government does not allow any political topic to appear in media such as documentaries or movies, books or art exhibitions. The rhythmic waves from the ocean represent my indomitable attitude.

*Place, where is the one?*³⁷ is the last photograph I made for this exhibition as a conclusion to the red skirt girl series. After the night of June 4th 2015, I went to the same beach to take another photo. Her gaze along the horizontal line evokes her desire to cast off restrictions. This red skirt girl appears in all of the *School* scenes, the *Clinic* scenes, the *Family Portrait*, the *Family Dinnertime* and the *After School* scenes. She exists in these scenes recalled from my early memories. She is presented as an only-child from a Chinese family: she is “*The One*”.



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³⁹ *Place, where is the one?* June 5th 2015

I title my exhibition *The One* - a contemporary term used to refer to the only-child from each family because I am part of the one-child society. I believe my presentation of this issue will inspire Western and Chinese audiences to improve their understanding of the outcome of the Chinese one-child policy, and the experience of being an only child. By evoking my fragmented memories with stage installation, photographic narrative, and self-performance, I hope to create a space to encourage viewers to address the uncanny absence of memories in and of themselves. The influence of the one-child policy has led me to pursue exciting and challenging new directions that aided me in defining who I have become.

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